DELACORTE PRESS

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July 7, 1976

Mr. Jim Lesar
1231 4th St.,S.W.
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Lesar,

Bernard Fensterwald suggested that I write to you with regard to some considerable difficulties I am experiencing with an intractable Federal Bureau of Investigation.

I am under contract to Delacorte Press and Dell Publishing to write a biography of the late columnist and television personality, Dorothy Kilgallen.

Miss Kilgallen, as you may know, was actively involved, until the time of her death in 1965, in a reportorial investigation into the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. She obtained a transcript of Jack Ruby's testimony before the Warren Commission and caused it to be published in The Journal-American several weeks before the official release date of the Report. She conducted, by Melvin Belli's admission, several private interviews with Ruby in his cell. On September 24, 1964, also in the Journal, she published the interview with Acquilla Clemmons that Mark Lane cites in Rush to Judgement - the interview conducted in August 1964 by a private investigator named Shirley Martin; in the same banner-headline story, she released a transcript of Lane's telephone call to Helen Markham, the conversation whose existence Markham subsequently denied. She peppered her columns with ominous and salient observations about Marina Oswald's contradictory testimony, the obvious dissimilarities between photos of Lee Harvey Oswald, the unholy alliance that appeared to her to exist between the Justice Department and Ruby's defense team, and the patent inadequacies of the Warren investigation. Additionally, she was for many years obsessed with the subject of Cuba and Castro. Her sources were fecund, propagandistic, fiercely anti-Castro.

After she leaked the Ruby testimony on August 19, 1964, there was an official announcement by FBI that the leak would be investigated. Presumably, that is a public admission that Kilgallen would be investigated. Even before that time, she was aware that the telephones in her house were being tapped.

Because of the intense interest in Dorothy Kilgallen's Kennedy-related activities and the mass skepticism about her death - officially described as accidental poisoning, pills and booze in modest but synergistic combination, I endeavored to obtain her

FBI file. Because I was under the mistaken impression that only kin could make such a request, Dorothy's son, Kerry Kollmar, at my suggestion and citing FOIA, requested, in early February of 1976, all F.B.I. documents relating to his mother. Mr. Kollmar received a letter from Clarence Kelley informing him that action would be taken. No further communication from FBI.

On June 6, 1976, acting on the advice of Robert Borosage, Center for National Security Studies, I wrote to the FBI and threatened to take them to court unless the documents were released within 30 days. Kerry Kollmar received another missive from Clarence Kelley informing him that no guarantee could be made vis-a-vis date of delivery. (I began identical action with CIA, but that was very recent. I enclose their response to me.)

Here is my situation. I have an impatient publisher who knows the commercial possibilities of this book and wants it last Thursday. They are willing to settle for a kind of Maileresque, imaginative elaboration of the possibilities, febrile and uninformed. I cannot conceive of publishing before obtaining Dorothy's dossiers. Further bilge can only tarnish and discredit the legitimate case against the Warren Report. I need someone with muscle and knowledge to get the wheels in motion so that I can sit down and begin to write the first fifty years of Dorothy Kilgallen's fascinating life.

My advance is spent. I cannot pay you now. This is an eminently commercial project, however, and I hope we can work out some agreement for deferred payments. I have many important journalistic contacts. One especially is aching to begin writing about the FBI's recalcitrance. But I don't know how efficacious that would be right now.

Can you do anything on my behalf?

Writing through my publisher will only delay. You may reach me by letter at: 98 Riverside Drive, New York 10024. Telephone 212-787-6857 or 212-PL. 3-2310.

Thank you.

Cordially,

Lee Israel

(Ms.) Lee Israel

ENC. P.S. Forgive the mushy ~~Pa~~ type.
It's a result of Xeroxing your original
for my files —